

School district scores in 56th percentile in baseline year of new accountability

By Jonathan Kleppinger

The Jessamine Journal

Nov. 2, 2012

Page 1 of 2

It was a mixed bag of results for Jessamine County as Kentucky left behind an old accountability system and released new scores for schools under a new model.

The first year of data in the state's Unbridled Learning accountability system, which replaces the No Child Left Behind system through a waiver from the federal government, was released to the public at midnight Friday.

The Jessamine County district's overall score — an aggregation of several components in a variety of areas — was in the 56th percentile, placing it in the "needs improvement" category that includes the lowest 70 percent of Kentucky districts this year.

Officials at the state, district and even school levels have been cautioning parents not to compare results from the new system to those from No Child Left Behind, instead emphasizing that the new data is a baseline for an entirely different system. Jessamine superintendent Lu Young said scores were expected to be lower because of the novelty of the assessments as well as new, higher standards focused on college and career readiness.

"It's an entirely different metric, because the common core standards alone are so much more rigorous ... I don't think we had wimpy standards in the past by any stretch of the imagination, but these are significantly higher," she said.

"(Students tested in 2012) came right into a system with higher standards that they had not been matriculated through, they hadn't been

prepared for, so it was a much tougher, higher set of expectations for kids than they'd worked through the system in the past."

The overall scores for districts and schools are on a 100-point scale, with a percentile rank along with each score. By coincidence, Jessamine County's score of 56 fell into the percentile of the same number — 14 percentile points away from proficient, a difference of only 2.4 scoring points.

Young said she hoped parents would take advantage of much deeper, richer data than just the overall scores for schools. School and district report cards are available on the Kentucky Department of Education website at education.ky.gov (a direct link to the report cards is here).

"I'm afraid parents are just going to go straight to the percentile and make a lot of inferences about what that percentile really means when what's on the site is a lot of important, good data as you drill down that's a whole lot bigger than just a single number," she said.

Wilmore Elementary led the way for individual schools with an overall score of 72.3 on the 100-point scale — higher than 94 percent of other elementary schools — earning a distinguished rating and a designation as one of the state's "highest-performing schools." East Jessamine High School and West Jessamine High School each scored above the 70th percentile — 72nd for East and 77th for West — to earn the designation of proficient. The four other elementary schools and the two middle schools fell below the 70th percentile and were classified as "needs improvement." (Scores for students at The Providence School were included in data for East and West middle and high schools, according to students' attendance area.)

Young said Wilmore's performance was a result of the school always striving to be "better than Wilmore was the year before." Another of her major celebrations was the **MORE**

high schools, with both schools' scores in reading and math above the state average and both schools above the state average in each of four end-of-course assessments.

In addition to achievement scores from testing, overall scores for elementary schools included components of gap and growth. The gap score measures the proficiency of students in traditionally low-performing subgroups, and the growth figure measures students' progress year-over-year compared to academically similar peers statewide. Middle-school scores include those three components and a score for college and career readiness; high-school scores include those four components and add graduation rate.

The growth measure is newest and most complex. Young said teachers would face an incredible challenge in trying to improve scores that are based on performance of peers across all of Kentucky.

"That's going to be real rocket science for schools, because I don't know how all the other kids in your similar academic peers group are going to perform — I have no control over that; I don't know how they're going to do," she said. "So (as a teacher,) I can set goals and get you as far as you can go personally, but I can't strategically manage the system in such a way that I know you're going to get that growth point."

East Jessamine Middle and East Jessamine High were labeled "focus schools" under the system because of low scores from students with disabilities in single subject areas — social studies at East Middle and English/language arts at East High. Young said the label doesn't "drastically change" practice for a school but highlights specific areas to address.

Of the six Jessamine County schools falling under "needs improvement," three scored between the 50th and 60th percentile — West Jessamine Middle School (58th), Nicholasville

Elementary School (56th) and Warner Elementary School (50th) — and three scored below the 30th percentile — Rosenwald-Dunbar Elementary School (29th), East Jessamine Middle School (28th) and Brookside Elementary School (22nd).

Young said the district would work specifically with the three lowest-scoring schools to help raise scores in the new system, but she pointed out that the accountability — specifically the growth component — required attention to the needs of even the highest-performing schools.

"The hard thing about a complex system is you've got all those plates spinning, and you can't let one of them come crashing down because you're tending to the others," she said. "That's what we're trying to figure out now as go on."

Young said she was happy with the 56th percentile as a starting point in a new system.

"I'm really optimistic about it; I think it's a good showing for our district as a starting place. It's not where we want to be, but it's a good starting place, and I think we'll quickly operationalize around the new system and see some good gains from '12 to '13."

The accountability system will include a component of program review next year and teacher and principal evaluation the following year. Young said the increasingly complex system is valuable in evaluating the district but it is not the only feedback.

"We look at it very holistically to say, 'What will make Jessamine County the very best district that Jessamine County can be?'" she said. "I make no bones about the fact that this is a really important, huge part of that, but it's not the only thing. We want to try to be as global in our perspective on the district and improvement as we possibly can be."

END

Test offers a new measuring stick

BY DENNIS O'NEIL
NEW ERA STAFF WRITER

Test results released this morning show the Christian County school district just

below the state average on its overall score. The assessment, the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress, is in its first year and is used to evaluate the state's elementary,

middle and high schools.

The state was granted a waiver from No Child Left Behind law earlier this year, allowing the commonwealth to implement a new testing method. The K-PREP

test is part of a larger accountability model called Unbridled Learning, which will be phased in over the next three years.

As a district, Christian County schools had an average score of 50.7, a few points off the state average of 55.2. At all three academic levels, the difference between district scores and the state average is marginal.

District elementary schools scored an average 53.3 with the state average being 57.3. Middle schools scored 47.2, compared to the state average of 53.5. High schools scored at 51.7 against a state average of 54.8.

SEE TEST PAGE A7

FROM PAGE A1

Unbridled Learning grades schools based on categories of achievement, gap reduction, student growth, college and career readiness and graduation rates. The K-PREP test, given to schools this past spring, is used for ratings in the achievement, gap reduction and growth categories.

K-PREP tests elementary and middle school students in reading, math, social studies, science and writing. End-of-course exams are given at the high school

level in the test's core subjects. In the social studies category, for example, students can be tested in an American history course.

College and career readiness are calculated using several components, including results from ACT and COMPASS testing. Graduation rates are calculated based on students who graduate in a four-year period.

With the new system, schools receive percentile rankings on a scale of 0 to 100. Schools that score in the 90th percentile or above are considered "distinguished." Those between the 70th and 89th percentiles are considered "proficient" while those below the 70th are rated as "needs improvement."

In Christian County, only one school, South Christian Elementary, earned a proficient rating by scoring in the 86th percentile. All other schools ranked in the needs improvement category. Three schools — North Drive Middle, Indian Hills Elementary and Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary — ranked in the 10th percentile or lower.

Exact percentile rankings for the district weren't available. However, Christian County Public Schools provided a chart indicating a school district with a proficient ranking would have achieved a score of at least 58.4, 8.4 points above Christian County's score.

However, many Kentucky school districts had similar problems with the test. According to data released by the Kentucky Department of Education, out of 1,296 schools tested, 899 ranked in the needs improvement category. Out of 174 school districts, 121 received a needs improvement ranking.

At a recent board of education meeting, Superintendent Mary Ann Gemmill said the district was anticipating low scores, emphasizing that K-PREP presents a higher standard for students than previous tests. Gemmill said they are planning intervention strategies to help schools bring up their scores.

"We have to hit the ground running," Gemmill said. "We are going to provide some structures for schools in the greatest need."

District Assessment Coordinator Tracey Leath said they will be using intervention strategies with each school, but plan to focus on schools with lower scores. Gemmill plans to have one-on-one meetings with school principals to develop different strategies. Individual staff members from the district may be assigned to help schools in particular areas, Leath said.

In the individual categories, schools had the most trouble in growth. Only one school, South Christian, hit the state's average score in the category, which is calculated by comparing students' math and reading scores from year to year. Students are placed into a peer group based on the range in which they score.

If students don't score above the 40th percentile in their peer group, they are rated as not having achieved necessary growth. To measure growth this year, the K-PREP results were compared with results from the Kentucky Core Content Test, the state assessment it replaced.

Amy Wilcox, chief instructional officer for the school system, said that, even though results from two different testing methods were being compared, she thinks the growth as-

essment is accurate. She said students were rated based on others in their score range rather than those who scored much higher than them.

Wilcox said Kentucky schools have largely measured proficiency in testing rather than growth from year to year. She thinks

scores will improve in the growth category next year because they will be watching it more closely.

"We are teaching schools to be more data savvy with their scores," Wilcox said. "They can look at (them) to see who made a growth change. It's a rethinking of how we are looking at educating kids."

With the new system, schools are given an Annual Measurable Objective to meet each year. Leath said most Christian County schools will have to rate at least one point higher on their overall score to meet their AMO next year. If they are able to do so, the schools' ratings will be changed from "needs improvement" to "needs improvement-progressing."

Schools' AMOs will also change in the next few years as the state implements the remaining two phases of the Unbridled Learning model, which will include new instructional programs and support systems for schools. Once all three phases are implemented, which KDE expects to happen by the 2014-15 school year, schools will be given a consistent goal to reach over a five-year period.

"I hope people understand that there are more pieces of this coming," Wilcox said. "It is a constantly evolving system with more pieces being added to it all the time."

REACH DENNIS O'NEIL at 270-887-3240
or doneil@kentuckynewera.com

Unbridled Learning data released, sets baseline for future

Breakdown of score components also available online here

By Kelly Cantrall

The first results of the Unbridled Learning accountability model, the newest form of statewide school assessment, were unveiled and educators are happy to have the new baseline on which to build.

The superintendents of Elizabethtown Independent Schools and Hardin County Schools found highs and lows in the results, which include many more new sets of data than the previous model, the Kentucky Core Content Testing system.

Schools and districts receive one overall score, on a scale of 1 to 100, that is created using the data from five areas — achievement in various subject areas, student growth in reading and math, college and career readiness among high school students, graduation rates and the proficiency of at-risk student populations. Schools and districts also receive specific data in each of the five categories.

The tests also are based on the new, more rigorous Kentucky Core Academic Standards in English and math, which have been in place for a little more than a year.

Schools in the top 30 percent of scores are labeled “proficient,” while the other 70 percent are labeled “needs improvement.” This is recalculated every year based on how the scores fall with only the top 30 percent of schools ever being considered “proficient.” The top 10 percent of schools earned a “distinguished” mark.

Elizabethtown High School and LaRue County Middle School were rated as distinguished. Six Hardin County Schools were considered proficient — Central Hardin High School, East Hardin Middle School, G.C. Burkhead Elementary School, Heartland Elementary School, John Hardin High School, Lincoln Trail Elementary School and West Point School. LaRue County High School also was rated as proficient.

HCS Superintendent Nannette Johnston said the district wasn't too concerned about the labels, as they're dependent on the performance of other schools. HCS officials are more interested in taking baseline numbers and improving.

"I cannot emphasize that enough," Johnston said.

She said this first release of data allows everyone to move on.

"I kind of feel like everyone's been holding their breath," she said.

Elizabethtown High had the highest overall score of area high schools with 65.6 and North Hardin High School had the lowest at 52.9. LaRue County Middle had the highest overall score in the middle grades with 65.7 and North Middle School was at the opposite end of the scale at 52.5. Among 16 area elementary schools, scores ranged from G.C. Burkhead's 67.4 to Radcliff Elementary School at 50.0. West Point's elementary students scored a 66.2 overall and its middle school tally was 60.7.

The five sets of data allow the districts to be "data-rich," Johnston said.

"You can look at more of a holistic approach," she said.

Elizabethtown Superintendent Gary French said he and his staff were pleased with achievement scores in core subject areas, but there's much more information to consider this year.

"It's not all about achievement anymore," French said.

French said information concerning proficiency of at-risk students needs improvement, but he knows it will be addressed.

French said if the district focuses on strong teachers and instruction, the "test scores will take care of themselves," he said.

Mark Kopp, HCS associate superintendent for instructional services, agreed, saying the scores now allow educators to plan for the future. The tests that students take changed significantly, he said, but preparing students for May's assessment takes a day-to-day approach.

"It's really more about preparing students instructionally in a different way," Kopp said.

'Unbridled' test results arrive with new focus

By Victoria Grabner

A brand new set of test results was released to the public today, and the buzz phrase is college and career readiness.

But as you wade through the voluminous data for each school — detailed test results are available online — keep in mind that this isn't last year's test.

Readers will likely have questions. They may even be puzzled by what all the new data means for local students and teachers.

That's why The Gleaner will be giving its readers an introduction to this new assessment and accountability model, referred to as Unbridled Learning: College/Career Readiness for All.

We will be focusing on the highlights, as in: Why is there a new testing system? What does this mean for your children? Will students still be labeled as novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished? Which schools met the state average, goals and/or need improvement, and how was that determined? Can this year's overall results be compared to last year's overall results? What will the consequences be for schools that don't make the grade?

We'll do our best to touch on each of these issues. But for more detailed responses, readers are encouraged to call the Henderson County Schools,

Union County Public Schools and the Webster County Schools.

First, why the change?

Basically, it's because Kentucky's public schools have set their sights on making sure that students are ready for college and/or a career. They want to make sure that students are able to compete in a global economy. And to do that, they had to change how students are graded. In many cases, they had to change what students are tested on, too.

Why? Because this way, Kentucky's students will be held to a national standard of college and career readiness. Right now, Kentucky has the same content standards as 46 other states in math and English/language arts. And standards for science and social studies are currently being developed.

In fact, according to the local school district, Kentucky is the first state to test these new national standards as part of its state accountability system.

Last spring, students took the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) in five areas: Reading, math, science, social studies and writing. A good portion of what we are publishing today is based on those tests.

Additionally, high school students took end-of-course exams in Algebra II, English

II, biology and social studies or tests that corresponded to those subjects. All sophomores and juniors took the on-demand writing test. These scores are part of the overall scores, too.

Second, what does this mean for your children?

Your son or daughter will still be designated as novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished in the five subject areas. And students will still get to see their scores in each subject area. But they will now be judged based on different categories, and these categories will change depending on whether your child is in elementary, middle or high school. Those categories will also be weighted differently depending on the school level.

The formula is complex, but basically:

In elementary school, students are judged on achievement (30 percent), gap (30 percent) and growth (40 percent).

The gap score comes from looking at proficiency in reading, math, science, social studies and writing.

In the middle school, the categories are achievement (28 percent), gap (28 percent), growth (28 percent) and college/career readiness (16 percent).

At the high school, the categories are achievement, gap, growth, college/career readiness and the graduation rate. Each

category is weighted at 20 percent.

Third, which schools met the state average, goals and/or need improvement, and how is that determined?

That's complicated, but basically, schools that are at or above the 90th percentile are labeled distinguished. Schools in the 70th to 89th percentile are proficient. Schools below the 70th percentile are needing improvement.

Henderson County

Take-away points: As a whole, Henderson County Schools earned an overall score of 55.4, meaning the district is classified as needing improvement along with 69 percent of the school districts in Kentucky.

Spottsville, Cairo and East Heights elementary schools are designated as proficient schools in the district. Every other school except North Middle School is labeled as needing improvement.

North Middle is being called a "focus school" in the area of reading for students with disabilities, and in science for African-American students and students with disabilities.

"As always, we will be intensely viewing all of the massive amounts of data associated with this new testing system," said Jinger Carter, director of accountability and assessment.

continued

**'Unbridled' test results arrive with new focus
continued**

"By (looking at) the data and digging deeper we will be able to see our district strengths and areas for improvement. The same detailed study will occur for each school."

Carter added that the district has set forth a plan of action that will be unveiled on Nov. 8 when Superintendent Thomas Richey addresses the Henderson-Henderson County Chamber of Commerce and the community.

The plan will also appear in The Gleaner on the same day in a special insert.

Meanwhile, here's the breakdown in Henderson County:
(The overall state average for elementary schools is 57.3 points.)
A.B. Chandler: 60.3 points.
Bend Gate: 54.4.
Cairo: 68.1.
East Heights: 68.
Jefferson: 52.3.
Niagara: 61.1.
South Heights: 52.8.
Spottsville: 69.4.

(The overall state average for middle schools is 53.5.)
North Middle: 46.1.
South Middle: 54.8.
(The overall state average for high schools is 54.8.)
Henderson County High School: 55.2.

Union County
Take-away points: As a whole, the Union County Public Schools earned an

overall score of 50.9, meaning the district is classified as needing improvement along with 69 percent of the school districts in Kentucky.

Morganfield, Sturgis and Uniontown elementary schools are designated as needing improvement. Union County Middle and Union County High schools are labeled as "focus schools."

This means that these schools have not closed the achievement gap in at least one area and will need to focus on closing those gaps. More specific information was not available by press time.

However, elementary level science and social studies are strong points in the district, according to these results.

"The district's growth is encouraging, as it shows more than half of Union County students at every level — elementary, middle and high — making typical or higher annual growth in reading and math," a news release said.

Here's the breakdown in Union County scores:
(The overall state average for elementary schools is 57.3.)
Morganfield Elementary: 50.4.
Sturgis Elementary: 55.1.
Uniontown Elementary: 57.7.
(The overall state average for middle schools is 53.5.)

Union County Middle School: 49.2.
(The overall state average for high schools is 54.8.)
Union County High School: 50.

Webster County
Take-away points:
Webster County Schools earned an overall score of 54.8, meaning the district is classified as needing improvement along with 69 percent of the school districts in Kentucky.

Slaughters and Clay schools are designated as being proficient at the middle school level, while Dixon, Providence and Sebree are designated as needing improvement at the middle school level. Clay, Dixon, Providence and Slaughters schools are in need of improvement at the elementary level. Webster County High School needs improvement, too. Sebree's elementary level is a "focus school" because of limited English proficiency scores in the area of reading.

"The district realizes there is much work to be done to be considered a progressing district and the work has begun to see those results," the district said in a news release.

Here's the breakdown in Webster County scores:
(The overall state average for elementary schools is 57.3.)
Clay Elementary: 59.
Dixon Elementary: 56.5.

Providence Elementary: 50.7.
Sebree Elementary: 56.
Slaughters Elementary: 56.7.
(The overall state average for middle schools is 53.5.)
Clay Elementary: 62.5.
Dixon Elementary: 49.6.
Providence Elementary: 49.6.
Sebree Elementary: 48.3.
Slaughters Elementary: 62.4.
(The overall state average for high schools is 54.8.)
Webster County High School: 54.9.

Fourth, can these overall results be compared to last year's overall results?

No. That's because last year, students were being tested on their basic proficiency in math and reading. This year, students are being measured on their readiness for college and a career.

But another reason the scores can't be directly compared is that the scale used to determine student scores is different. Last year, the scale was 0 to 140. This year, the scale is 0 to 100.

Fifth, what happens if a school doesn't meet the state goal?

Nothing this year. But in a worst case situation, schools that repeatedly fail to meet state goals can eventually be taken over by another entity, restaffed, or closed, among other things.

Area educators optimistic despite low test scores

BY MEGAN HARRIS
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

As educators across the region welcomed a flood of feedback and data Friday on the state's inaugural Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) exams, they also began a wave of comprehensive plans toward widespread improvement.

"We're not happy overall, but this is an opportunity," said Matt Perkins, assistant superintendent of instruction at Muhlenberg County Schools. "Now that we know where we are, we have a chance to refocus on what we're great at and address those standards our kids aren't excelling on."

Of Muhlenberg County's eight sites, only Bremen Elementary School was deemed proficient with a score of 63.0 on a 100-point scale, sinking the district to the 46th percentile.

K-PREP exams, one piece of the state's Unbridled Learning accountability model, scored each school and district on a scale from 1 to 100, which were rank-ordered both by district and

grade level. Percentile ranks determined whether schools and districts were dubbed distinguished, above the 90th percentile; proficient, 70th to 89th percentile; or needs improvement, below the 70th percentile.

Locally, Owensboro Public Schools scored among the bottom 6 percent with an overall score of 45.7. Students attending Daviess County Public Schools achieved an overall score of 60.1, ranking the district proficient in the top 20 percent.

Like his counterparts across the state, Perkins spent the bulk of last week in meetings with school leadership teams and teachers, drilling down scores of data to find what worked and what didn't.

"We're already making mid-course corrections," he said Friday. "We want to go back and look at what these assessments show our kids aren't proficient in. In a lot of cases, that means re-examining whole units — even daily instruction plans — to find where we missed the standard. Were we not on target? Did we not delve deep enough? And we knew that would be a part of the process"

The district will likely take two to three years, he said, to internalize all the ideas they've bounced around this week.

Superintendent Kyle Estes of Hancock County Schools boasted the highest performance of any regional district, scoring proficiency in three of four schools. The district scored in the 87th percentile with 62.1 points. Only North Hancock Elementary was said to need improvement.

"We feel like we're in decent shape," Estes said, noting areas where he said students "either underperformed or didn't meet the expectations we'd envisioned for them."

At the high school, end-of-course exams look good, Hancock County Middle School needs work among minorities or students with disabilities. North Hancock lacked growth, he said.

"And growth is key," he said. "If we're growing, the test scores will take care of themselves."

As the region's smallest district, teachers have the unique advantage of involving the community on a personal level, Estes said.

"Smaller systems are more conducive to community volunteers, and that gives our teachers time to address the needs of others," he said. "The more help you get with a student, the better their performance at every level."

McLean County Schools received a needs improvement ranking in the 65th percentile. Marie Gatton Phillips Elementary School and McLean County Middle School earned proficiency with percentile rankings at 82 and 79, respectively. Overall, the district scored 57.7.

Like Estes, Superintendent Scott Lewis of Ohio

County Schools said Friday he's "proud to be proficient."

"Even the schools who need improvement did well here and there," he said, "especially in Horse Branch."

Five of Ohio County's eight schools earned proficiency, including Horse Branch Elementary School, which scored in the 86th percentile, up 14 percentile

points from the district's score of 58.5 overall. The school celebrated with community guests and former employees with skits from teachers and a performance by the Wulfe Bros., who travel the state performing educational concerts.

"We're so proud of them, of all our schools," Lewis said. "We've tried to really encourage our teachers to get to know the kids, know their families, where they live and what they're good at to build meaningful relationships. If kids know you appreciate them, they'll work harder. And we'll work harder for them."

Megan Harris, 691-7302,
mharris@messenger-inquirer.com

BOYLE SCHOOLS HIT TOP 10

Perryville, Liberty rank
'distinguished' in new
test results; most others
need improvement

By TODD KLEFFMAN
Danville Advocate Messenger
November 3, 2012
Page 1 of 2

On Friday, the confetti and streamers were flying at Perryville Elementary School.

At Liberty Elementary, there was dancing and fire trucks with sirens blaring.

And at Boyle County High School, state Education Commissioner Terry Holiday stopped by to congratulate the school district on its move in to the Top 10 in the state-based on the results of the new K-PREP assessment tests, which were released Friday.

"We thought we would do well. The reason we thought we would do well is because we've got kids who are passionate, competitive and bright, and we've got great teachers and support staff," Boyle County Superintendent Mike LaFavers said. "I knew we would do well because I see what's going on in the classrooms every day, but this is better than I expected."

Boyle achieved the districtwide classification of "distinguished" under the new assessment system, widely considered to be more rigorous than the CATS tests it replaced last year. The district, as a whole, scored 65.2, which ranked it in the 95th percentile of all the school districts in the state.

Perryville Elementary also rated "distinguished" with a 71.5 score, ranking it in the 93 percentile. Boyle's other schools — the high school, middle school and Junction City and Woodlawn elementaries — were all classified as "proficient," meaning that no Boyle County school was listed as "needs improvement."

"We had challenged the kids to set some school records with the new tests. Our goal had been to be "proficient," so making 'Distinguished' was a big deal for us," Perryville Principal Chris Slone said. "All the credit goes to the work ethic of the students and staff, and we have a wonderfully supportive community. When you put those three things together, a "distinguished" school is the result."

Casey County schools ranked second highest among area districts, scoring 59.4 and ranking in the 80th percentile of all districts in the state. Liberty Elementary led the way with 74.5 score and 97th percentile ranking, earning a "distinguished" classification. Casey Middle and Walnut Hill Elementary both earned
MORE

"proficient" labels, while the high school and Jones Park Elementary were tagged as "needing improvement."

"We had performed well under the old system, but we fared very well with the new one," Liberty Principal Boyd Harris said Friday. "It's a testament to the fact that we're doing a good job with instruction on a consistent basis. Our teachers do a good job of focusing on individual students. We're very proud to be in the top 3 percent, in the Top 20 in the state."

Danville, Burgin and Lincoln, Garrard and Mercer county school districts all were classified as "needing improvement." Of all the individual schools in those five districts, only Camp Dick Elementary in Garrard and Hustonville Elementary in Lincoln earned "proficient" status. The rest were labeled as "needing improvement."

The K-PREP assessment system was designed to rank all schools against each other and set up so that all schools ranking below the 70th percentile are designated as "needing improvement."

"It's pretty alarming that 69 percent of our schools are said to need improvement," said Garrard County Superintendent Donald Aldridge, whose district scored the lowest in

the area with a 53.1 overall score and 37th percentile ranking.

Though Garrard didn't perform as well as he expected, Aldridge said he believes the new K-PREP testing provides a better assessment overall of students' performance than the CATS model. He noted that improving the district's composite score by just a couple of points could move it up in the rankings 10 or more spaces, and programs are already in place to make that happen, he said.

New Garrard Middle Principal Gina Kidd has already cut down on disciplinary problems, additional literacy programs have been added and students scored their highest ever on assessment testing done in September, Aldridge said. At the high school, more tutoring is available in math and science, seven new advanced placement courses have been added and ACT scores have improved, he said.

"I promise you we will be better than 37 percent next year," Aldridge said.

END

School system is 'Proficient and proud'

By Dan Adkins

Georgetown News-Graphic

November 3, 2012

Page 1 of 2

Scott County Schools outperformed more than 75 percent of Kentucky's 174 public school districts, results of a new state assessment test show.

And, for Superintendent Patricia Putty, it was a pleasant surprise.

You must be logged in with the proper services to print this article.

An e-communication from the district to parents proclaimed "proficient and proud."

"We didn't know quite what to expect," said Putty, referring to the fact that the 2012 test was the first time students across the state had taken the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) exam.

The district ranks in the 77th percentile of the state's school districts, and one of its elementary schools was listed among the state's "schools of distinction."

Not all the news was good: A middle school ranked behind most of the rest of the state's middle schools.

Still, school district officials found a lot to be proud of in the results of the K-PREP, the assessment and accountability exam conducted statewide for the first time last spring. The tests measure student knowledge and, in the upper grades, college- and career-readiness.

"If you look at the 13 districts nearest Scott County... there are only two districts higher than us," said Matt Thompson, assistant superintendent of student learning. Woodford County scored in the 81st percentile, while Williamstown Independent was in the 78th percentile.

The state assessment, which for the first time applies national standards to Kentucky's schools and schoolchildren, listed Scott County Schools as "proficient," one of three ratings based on the test. The other ratings are "distinguished" – the best – and "needs improvement" – the worst.

Eastern Elementary School scored in the 95th percentile – better than all but 5 percent of the state's elementary schools. Its students' performance won Eastern a designation as a "school of distinction."

Three other district schools – Northern Elementary, Western Elementary and Royal Spring Middle – each scored in the 93rd percentile. They were named "distinguished" schools.

Two elementary schools, Garth and Stamping Ground, were designated as "proficient."

Five of the district's 11 schools were deemed "needs improvement," including Georgetown Middle School which scored in the 10th percentile. That means 90 percent of Kentucky's middle schools outperformed GMS.

Scott County High, Scott County Middle, Anne Mason Elementary and Southern Elementary also need improvement, according to the state results.

Putty, Thompson and Chip Southworth, the district's director of secondary education, said administrators and teachers at all of

MORE

the district's schools – high- and low-ranked – will use the results to identify and improve areas of weakness.

"We're always in a cycle of continuous improvement, constantly evaluating ourselves," Putty said.

Scott County High did outperform the state average for last year's graduating students who were college- and career-ready. The percentage in Scott County was 60.9, compared to the state average of 51.8 percent.

Putty pointed out the K-PREP test this year replaced the Kentucky Core Content Test that had been used for nearly 20 years. The KCCT used a scale from 0 to 140, while the new K-PREP test is scaled from 0 to 100.

The tests also use different measures to gauge student progress – and that means there's no way to validly compare this year's scores to last year's, she said.

State Education Department officials also have discouraged parents and others from trying to do a side-by-side evaluation of schools' performances using this year's and last year's test results.

But Putty and Thompson agreed that a possible measure of the district's performance would be in comparing its ranking to 10 other districts of similar enrollment size.

Of those 10 districts, three – Pulaski, McCracken and Daviess counties – scored higher than Scott County. Pulaski County Schools ranked in the 90th percentile and was named a "distinguished district."

McCracken County scored in the 89th percentile, while Daviess County was in the

82nd percentile. Both were deemed proficient, as is Scott County with its 77th percentile rank.

The other districts – Christian, Henderson, Hopkins, Jessamine, Laurel, Madison and Pike counties – all were deemed "needs improvement." Pike County ranked in the 18th percentile.

Thompson had looked geographically at how Scott County's results compared with Owen, Grant, Harrison, Bourbon, Fayette, Clark, Jessamine, Woodford, Anderson and Franklin counties, as well as Williamstown and Frankfort independent schools.

School of Distinction

Eastern Elementary

Distinguished

Northern Elementary

Western Elementary

Royal Spring Middle School

Proficient

Garth Elementary

Stamping Ground Elementary

Needs Improvement

Georgetown Middle School

Scott County Middle School

Anne Mason Elementary

Southern Elementary

Scott County High School

END

EES celebrates 'School of Distinction'

By Dan Adkins
Georgetown News-Graphic
November 3, 2012

How does Ed Denney feel about Eastern Elementary School's performance on last spring's student assessment tests?

"Ecstatic," said Denney, the school's principal.

"We're in the top five percent of the state," he said.

Eastern was named a "school of distinction" by the Kentucky Department of Education, based on its students' performance on the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) test.

It ranked in the 95th percentile of Kentucky's schools, and was the best-performing school in the Scott County School District.

"The results prove that Eastern has all the important pieces in place to be given the title of 'school of distinction,'" Denney said.

The school intended to not be shy about marking its achievement.

Friday afternoon at 1 p.m., the Scott County Sheriff's Office will deliver – by helicopter – the official test results at a celebration for the students.

How was the success possible?

"We have hard-working teachers and parental support, and our students are focused on instructional improvement. We have them set goals, and we help them develop a plan toward academic achievement," he said.

The Central Office also has done its part, Denney said.

"I have to give Mrs. Putty and Matt a lot of credit," said Denney, referring to Superintendent Patricia Putty and Assistant Superintendent of Student Learning Matt Thompson.

"They've brought initiatives and programs to Scott County that we have embraced at Eastern," Denney said.

REACTION MIXED TO JCPS' SCORES

Some call for patience; others air criticisms, concerns

By Chris Kenning

ckenning@courier-journal

The Courier-Journal

11/3/12

In the wake of Jefferson County Public Schools' grim showing on tough new state tests, community reaction ranged from pleas for patience and praise for raising the bar to criticism and calls for charter schools.

Scores released Friday from a new state accountability system found that nearly 80 percent of the district's schools fell into the "needs improvement" category, based on academic scores, growth, achievement gaps, college readiness and graduation rates.

Reading and math proficiency rates, now based on higher standards, fell sharply across most schools in a district that posted a 68 percent graduation rate and was ranked in the state's 23rd percentile.

At a news conference held by Superintendent Donna Hargens to outline her plan to improve those results, several business, education advocates and civil rights activists said that the results were of concern but that the higher standards eventually will better prepare students for college and the workplace.

"We shouldn't be discouraged," said Larry Caruso, an executive with General Electric, which has spent millions supporting the development of new standards. "We recognize that we have a competition problem globally, and we need to reverse that. Raising the bar on education is the first step." The Rev. Jerry Stephenson, state coordinator for the Black Alliance for Educational Options, said he expected that the scores were "not going to be pretty," but found them "worse than I thought." He said he was particularly disturbed by reading proficiency rates as low as 38 percent at middle schools. "Too many children are not getting it," he said, arguing that the results underscore the need to try charter schools. "We've got to stop being dogmatic about bringing in other systems. ... We can't wait five more years to see if kids are going to make it." Cherie Dimar, president of the 15th District PTA, which has held workshops on the new standards, said she's glad schools are "expecting a lot more out of students" but added that some parents were alarmed and upset at the results. The results marked the first release under the "Unbridled Learning" accountability system, which replaced the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System after the Kentucky General Assembly in 2009 mandated a new system with more rigorous standards.

As part of that change, Kentucky was the first state to adopt the Common Core Standards, a new national curriculum that seeks to teach concepts more deeply and is better aligned with college expectations.

In some cases, those expectations were four years beyond what high school seniors were required to master. As a result, officials had braced the public for scores they said could be grim — and they were.

"Today's results are disappointing and not acceptable for our community or our students," said Eileen Pickett, executive vice president at Greater Louisville Inc., the metro chamber of commerce, adding that her group supports the new standards. She said that "recognizing the new standards raise the bar on academic achievement, it's important that we see these first-year scores as an opportunity."

Dimar said she was struck by the variance in scores and graduation rates among schools. Jefferson County's college and career readiness rate was at 45 percent, ranging from as low as 11 percent at Valley High to 91 percent at duPont Manual High. Student proficiency percentages also varied widely as did graduation rates, which were as low as 40 percent at Iroquois High School. James Allen, chairman of the Jefferson County Educational Foundation, warned that "this is an ambitious goal that will not be met overnight." Raoul Cunningham, president of the Louisville NAACP, said the results should help the district improve, particularly among minority, low-income, disabled and limited-English students who the results showed weren't learning at sufficient levels.

MORE

The state identified 57 "focus schools" in Jefferson County that must close achievement gaps and boost graduation rates.

But Cunningham also said the district's plan — which includes moving more resources into schools, improving instruction and extending learning outside school walls — is promising. He said whichever candidates win the three school board seats that are up for grabs in Tuesday's election should maintain that focus. Elizabeth Berfield, a parent and a candidate for the District 2 school board seat, said she was "disappointed but not shocked," but believes it's better to "have an accurate picture of where we stand." She said the board should ensure improvement plans get sufficient resources.

Chris Fell, another parent running for the District 7 school board seat, blamed low scores on the time students spend on bus rides as part of a student assignment system that aims to foster diversity. He said the latest results gave him new ammunition to make his case to overturn the plan.

Mary Gwen Wheeler, executive director of 55,000 Degrees, which seeks to boost post-secondary attainment in the area, called the results "sobering" but necessary as part of a path to improvement. She said they pointed out deficiencies among middle schools and achievement gaps that should be addressed.

Mayor Greg Fischer said now that the results are known, "the question everybody should be asking themselves is how can I help, whether it is at school, or at home with your child — so we can begin to close these gaps and become the national and even international standard ourselves." David Kareem, chairman of the state board of education, said the new system was a landmark change that would drive future gains. "It's a great day to start over and work to improve," he said.

Reporter Chris Kenning can be reached at (502) 582-4697.

The Kentucky Standard

Get the story. Get The Standard.

While scores seem low, it doesn't mean schools are failing

By Jennifer Corbett

Saturday, November 3, 2012 at 8:53 am

Local school officials agree that, while KPREP scores seem lower, it doesn't mean local schools are failing.

Results from the Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress (KPREP) accountability system, which replaced the Kentucky Core Content Test that was under the CATS system used in previous years, were released Friday.

Damon Jackey, a member of the Nelson County School Board, said it's hard to compare KPREP to CATS.

"You can't say one is better than the other," Jackey said. "While this first year, test results may look disappointing, we're already seeing some positive results."

One example of the positive results is a clearer picture of what areas need to be restructured and what programs are working in the classroom.

KPREP grades schools on five sections: achievement, growth, gap, college/career readiness and graduation rate. Once the grade is set, they're compared to other schools throughout Kentucky.

Nelson County schools had an overall score of 54.1, which put them in the 45th percentile. Since Thomas Nelson High School just opened this school year, they were not included in the test results.

Hearing that Nelson County scored in the 45th percentile was something Jackey said he wasn't initially proud of, but knowing the amount in which schools are graded changed his point of view.

It shows there are "some things we're doing that are paying off," Jackey said. "I think long term it is going to give us a much better picture."

Bardstown schools had an overall score of 51.6, which put them in the 29th percentile. Both districts were labeled, as "needs improvement."

Margie Bradford, a member of the Bardstown Independent Board of Education, said the phrase "needs improvement" is a misnomer.

"In essence, every school needs improvement because you want to do better," she said.

The district's job is to make sure kids are learning at their optimal ability, which takes a lot of strategy, Bradford noted.

Bardstown and Nelson County schools said they're trying to inform the public about the changes through forums.

At the end of the day, it's not the score that matters; it's how the student is being challenged in the classroom to become more college/career ready.

"Just because the school has a different grade, it doesn't mean they've dropped," Bradford said. "The bottom line is we're not getting worse, we're just taking a different route to getting better."

New state test scores set baselines

Hanson Elementary receives distinguished ranking

BY ERIN SCHMITT
MESSENGER STAFF WRITER
ESCHMITT@THE-MESSENGER.COM

State testing has entered a new frontier, making it hard for local school officials to qualify how their districts performed because baselines are being established with this year's scores.

Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress results were released to the public Friday after school officials were given time to review the data.

It's the first set of scores from the new accountability model, which is not comparable to the old Commonwealth Accountability Testing System model used in Kentucky for years.

"It's kind of like asking someone to compare total quarterback rating to someone's batting average," said Jason Clark, the director of middle and secondary instruction and assessment for Hopkins County Schools.

K-PREP is measured on a 100-point scale, whereas the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System was out of 140 points. Another new element is that each school and district receives a percentile ranking in the state for the first time.

Hopkins County Schools received a districtwide score of 56.1 points with a 57th percentile ranking. Dawson Springs Independent Schools was ranked in the 61st percentile with 57 points, while Webster County Schools had a 48th percentile ranking with 54.8 points.

Under CATS, each school and district was labeled distinguished, proficient, apprentice or novice.

K-PREP has distinctions of distinguished for schools or districts that rank in the 90th percentile or above, proficient for schools or districts between the 70th-89th percentiles, and any schools or districts that fall below 70 are labeled needs improvement.

Hanson Elementary was the lone local school to receive a distinguished rating, ranking in the 94th percentile.

"Obviously, we're very proud of the effort they put in there — the students, teachers, community support — everyone involved in that process," Clark said. "We have hardworking teachers in all our schools, and though not all the scores are as lofty as Hanson's it doesn't mean that the teachers and students don't work hard or the community support isn't there."

Grapevine, Jesse Stuart, Southside and West Broadway elementaries, as well as James Madison Middle School and grades 6-8 for Dawson Springs, Clay Elementary and Slaughters Elementary, all received proficient rankings.

Kim Saalwaechter, the instructional supervisor of assessment and accountability for Webster County Schools, commended Clay and Slaughters for achieving proficient ratings.

Slaughters students performed under stress and trauma amidst discussion by the school board to close the school, Saalwaechter said. The school shuttered

its doors in May and its students have since been redistricted.

Clark also singled out Hopkins County Central High School for praise. Last year, the school's consistently low scores resulted Central being named a persistently low-achieving school.

The school jumped from the bottom 10 percent last year to the 62nd percentile in 2012, Clark said.

Since Central still falls in the needs improvement category and was a PLA school last year, it has been designated as a priority school under the K-PREP accountability model. It will remain a priority school until it scores proficient for two consecutive years, Clark said.

Some local schools have been labeled focus schools.

There are three ways to be labeled a focus school.

Any high school with a graduation below 60 percent falls into the category.

Schools are ranked by the student gap group score, which is how various student groups, including ethnicity, special education and free/reduced lunch, perform in the content areas.

Those that fall in the lowest 10 percent of the gap group score or have an individual gap group underperforming in the third

standard deviation below the mean are also focus schools.

"We don't know how many it means to have too many," said Clark. "It's just when they lay out all the data compared to everyone else in the state, if more of your gap students are in this third standard deviation, then that's another way you can be considered a focus school."

In Webster County, Sebree Elementary was labeled as a focus school because of Limited English Proficiency scores in reading, said Saalwaechter. It had not been an issue in the past, so it came as a bit of a surprise, she said.

"We are trying to meet the language barrier and meet the needs of the Limited English Proficiency students in reading, she said. "We have work there to do."

West Hopkins School grades 6-8, is considered a focus school because its student gap groups scored lower than the students who didn't fall in any of the categories, Clark said.

Browning Springs Middle School was named a focus school based on its special education reading score, while South Hopkins Middle School received the same designation for its special education science score.

A baseline was established with this year's scores, Clark said, with each school and district receiving a target to shoot for next year. Those labeled as needs improvement who raise scores will be designated as needs improvement but progressing.

The district will need to take a critical look at what's being taught and if teachers are instructing to the standards set by the state, he said. It must also make sure support systems are in place for students who struggle with the standards.

"It's more than just academic achievement now," Clark said. "It is a student growing from a previous year."

Saalwaechter said she would have liked to see higher scores in Webster County and no "needs improvement" ratings, but she understands there are areas to work on and everyone is operating under a new accountability system.

Starting Wednesday, administrators will meet to discuss how to raise the scores and that will be then addressed on a school level.

The new accountability has five components: achievement, gap, growth, college/career readiness and graduation rate.

Achievement is measured by how a student does on reading, math, science, social studies and writing. Gap is how various student groups, for example free and reduced lunch, perform in comparison to their peers.

Growth is how all students are making progress from year to year in math and reading. College and career readiness, which is not measured at the elementary level, is how schools and districts are preparing students for the transition after high school.

Graduation rate is how many students are graduating on time and is only a measurement component for high schools.

County pledges improvement after placing in bottom fifth of state

By Russ Cassady Editor

“Needs improvement.”

Encompassed in that label are both statements and questions about the Pike County School District after the results were announced this week of the state’s newest assessment model — Unbridled Learning — and its testing.

Like 120 other districts across the state, Pike County was saddled with a label of “Needs Improvement,” while the district was also ranked as being in the lower fifth of districts statewide, with a ranking of being in the 18th percentile.

And, according to district officials, while the “Needs Improvement” label doesn’t sum up the school district, it does show that work is needed.

During a press conference on Thursday at the Pike County Schools Central Office in Pikeville, district officials said they’ve been preparing for both the assessment results and the testing itself for some time now.

“We started back in the summer ... with some preparation, looking at how we’re going to address the new standards, the new process and so on,” said Superintendent Roger Wagner. “We were doing that prior to the test results being released.”

For the district, the assessment, which measures several different areas, including a standardized test and items such as how well the district’s low-income and special needs students perform and how well schools do toward preparing students for life after high school, showed both the best and worst of the district.

Sherri Heise, supervisor/CIO at the district, said during the press conference that, in five out of the six areas tested at the elementary school level, the district’s “Gap” students, who are students on free or reduced lunch or who are classified as special needs, scored above the state average.

At the middle school level, she said, “Gap” students scored above the state average on four out of six categories and, at the high school level, those students scored above the state average on three out of six categories.

The district was also celebrating the success of three schools, which were the only three declared “Proficient” in the entire district.

Dorton Elementary (grades three through five) was declared a “Proficient” school, with a ranking in the 87th percentile, while Valley Elementary received a rating in the 80th percentile.

Virgie Middle School came close to being declared a “Distinguished” school, with students there scoring in the 89th percentile.

Dorton had the highest growth score at the elementary level, Feds Creek had the highest growth score at the middle school level, and Belfry High School had the highest growth score at the high school level.

Belfry also had the highest college and career readiness level of all of the district’s high schools, but that wasn’t enough to keep the school from being named a “Focus School.”

“Focus Schools” are those schools which have a “Gap” group score in the bottom ten percent of scores for all elementary, middle and high schools; schools with an individual student subgroup with a score in the third standard deviation below the state average for all students; or high schools that have a graduation rate that has been less than 60 percent for two consecutive years.

Also joining Belfry High School in that category was Elkhorn City Elementary School, the scores from which ranked near the bottom of the state.

According to the data from the Kentucky Department of Education, Elkhorn City Elementary’s middle school-level ranked in the 2nd percentile of districts statewide, while the school’s elementary level ranked in the 1st percentile.

In college readiness, no school in the Pike County district had half of its students ready to go to college or into a career, the stats show. And, the KDE data shows that Phelps High School’s college/career readiness rate of 12.9 percent was the second-lowest in the state. District-wide, the college or career readiness rate, the data shows, was less than 35 percent.

The bad news, however, does not define the district, officials said.

MORE



"There is a strong sense of urgency amongst our leadership and our teachers in this district to turn these scores around," Heise said. "No one believes this is representative of who we are as Pike County schools, or who our students are ... Our focus is not on the numbers, it's on the students. It's not about a number, it's about the faces behind the numbers."

Also, during the press conference, officials stressed that this is the first time for this type of testing.

A tool for improvement

The administrators, during Thursday's press conference, spoke several times on what happens now that the results are in.

"We'll kind of evaluate where we're at, where we're going to get to and the vehicle we're going to use to get there," said Superintendent Wagner. "I think we're very capable across this county for our students to do very well. Now that we have a baseline, we know where we're at ... and we have begun the work and I think we're going to see improvement of all our schools."

Shelby Valley principal Greg Napier said that he is glad to see the changes in assessment represented by the Unbridled Learning system.

"Finally we have an accountability system that we truly think is focused on our kids and getting our kids ready for college and/or careers," he said.

Napier said the new assessment is a "truer measure" than the previous assessment because the "core content" tested with CATS required teachers to focus on the testing instead of just educating children.

"It came down to teaching our kids how to take the test," he said.

Also, Napier said he is glad that it takes into account not just college readiness, but career readiness.

"Not every kid in this county or in this state is going to go to college," he said, adding that another component of Unbridled Learning is that it also examines how children who are not going to college are prepared for careers after high school. "It's focusing on all my kids."

Mullins School principal Phillip Birchfield said there are a lot of things about which his students can be proud, but some work that needs to be done.

"We're a different school than a lot of the other folks," he said. "In the last four years, we've grown by 315 kids; we've added over 300 new students ... And our teachers are still producing, they're still achieving at a high level."

Birchfield said that at the elementary school level, 53 percent of students and 75 percent of students showed a typical growth of 40 percent or more in the areas of reading and math, respectively. At the middle school level, the scores of 70 percent of students and 60 percent of students grew by 40 percent or more in reading and math, respectively.

Being able to see that year-to-year growth, Birchfield said, is something about which teachers at Mullins are excited. Also, Mullins students exceeded state averages on several tests. The school, he said, missed being labeled "Proficient" by one point, and he guaranteed that the school will reach that level by the next time results are released.

The administrators said that officials are already going through the scores and working toward implementing changes to make improvements.

"Really, it just comes down right now to school improvement planning," Heise said, adding that the planning for improvement didn't just begin at the release of the tests.

"The leaders of our schools are among the best in the state," she said. "They want to work smart, so they're not going to settle."

And, she said, the schools are working together.

"It's a collaborative thing," she said. "It's not a district-mandating type of thing. It's all of us working together to figure this out; what's best for Pike County schools and our students."

###

K-Prep test scores: Area schools need improvement

MARLA TONCRAY

marla.toncra@lee.net

The new K-Prep test scores, which rate how school districts are performing, were released Friday, and the new standards have rated all area school districts as "needs improvement."

K-Prep, Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress, is the result of Senate Bill 1 passed during the 2011 Kentucky General Assembly session.

The new accountability system, which reviewed tests scores from the 2011-2012 school year for the first year's results, replaced former testing programs such as the Kentucky Core Content Testing. K-Prep is also the state's approved accountability

program, which enabled Kentucky to get a waiver from the federal No Child Left Behind accountability system.

Students were tested in areas of math, science, reading, social studies and writing. In 2013, arts and humanities, practical living and vocational studies will be added to the tests. In 2014, teacher and principal effectiveness will be added to the scoring.

The new standards are more rigorous than previous testing systems and focuses on academic growth of the student, as compared to their peers. Within the test standards, 99 peer groups were established.

"It all comes back to growth,

See TEST, A2

TEST

FROM A1

for all grades, in all categories," said Ron Ishmael, assessment coordinator with Mason County School District.

School officials said the data will be reviewed and teachers will consult with students identified by the test. An example would be a student needing assistance in reading; the teacher will put together a study plan for a nine-week period, which will be reviewed and updated to gauge the next steps necessary to bring the student to the same level as his/her peers.

The categories established by K-Prep: distinguished, proficient and

needs improvement. Of Kentucky's 175 school districts, only 19 were rated distinguished and 35 were rated proficient. The remainder were all rated as needs improvement.

The scoring system is complicated, encompassing categories of achievement, gap, growth, college/career readiness, and graduation rate. The five categories are scored for an overall score, which results in a percentile rank, which then equates to the overall category rankings of distinguished, proficient and needs improvement. The distinguished, proficient and needs improvement rankings are then applied to both student and district score.

Schools or districts with a percentile of 70 or higher are classified as proficient

or distinguished; schools and districts falling below the 70 percentile mark are classified as needs improvement.

The following are the percentile ratings of school districts in the Buffalo Trace area: Augusta Independent, 50.5; Bracken County, 54.2; Fleming County, 53.0; Lewis County, 47.5; Mason County, 57.7; Robertson County, 40.8. The overall state percentile is 55.2.

The test also assigns a ranking within the state, 1 to 175. The following are rankings for local districts: Augusta Independent, 139; Bracken County, 98; Fleming County, 113; Lewis County, 157; Mason County, 64; and Robertson County, 173.

While educators and administrators are still

absorbing test results, Mason County Middle School Principal Justin Moore and Intermediate School Principal Matt Stanfield both agreed now that school officials know what the test looks like, it will be easier for teachers to improve student instruction and how to prepare students throughout the year for the final test, which takes place over five days during the last 14 days of school.

Moore also pointed out students are accustomed to taking the test over the course of the school day; the new test is a timed test, giving students on average one minute to answer the questions, a significant change from previous testing procedures.

"The goal is to become proficient, we're in the upper section of the needs

improvement category, it's do-able and we think our students, teachers and principals are capable of leading us to that," said Ishmael.

Fleming County Vice Principal Jesse Bacon also commented on his district's performance, making special note of the achievement of the high school.

Bacon noted the high school had gone from a high school that ranked 223 out of 230 high schools in Kentucky to a school that now ranks 66 out of 230 high schools, ahead of all area schools; and the percentage of students who graduated from Fleming County High School last year college and career ready out numbered 92 percent of all other high schools in the state. Rank-

ing 19 out of 230 schools.

"We believe that this type of turnaround warrants attention from the same parents, community members, and media outlets that wanted to report and dwell on the fact that a year ago we were labeled "persistently low achieving." There has never been a persistently low achieving school that has made such a turnaround in that short amount of time. Our faculty, staff and students have worked tirelessly the last 18 months to change the perception that others have painted of us. They deserve praise and recognition," Bacon said.

In addition to Fleming County, Bracken County High School was also rated as a "proficient" high school, according to the report, under the college/career readiness category.

Test scores: Many Ky. districts need improvement

FROM THE KENTUCKY PRESS NEWS SERVICE

Kentucky school districts are adjusting to a new testing system that ranks almost 70 percent of the state's schools in the lowest category: "needs improvement."

The results, released at 12:01 a.m. Friday, may come as a shock to school districts that had generally ranked higher in previous tests. But the system's design automatically ensured that 69 percent of schools and districts would end up in the "needs improvement" classification.

And state educators and testing experts caution parents and teachers not to panic, that the new test of national higher standards with more components — such as graduation rates and col-

lege and career readiness — meant more schools were bound to find the test harder going.

The other 31 percent of schools and districts are designated as either "proficient" or "distinguished."

"I'm still having to adjust my vocabulary," said Anthony Orr, superintendent of Nelson County schools and a former principal of Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Lexington.

"In some sense, any of us would say we need improvement," Orr said. For the past nine months, he and school employees have been trying to prepare the community by pointing out higher standards in math and

SEE SCORES, PAGE A5

FROM PAGE A4

reading, plus many more components. (In addition, the highest score has gone from 140 to 100.)

For example, at the elementary level, schools are judged on actual test scores, along with the performance of minority, special education and low-income students. Around the state, 31 schools were proficient or distinguished but were also "focus" schools, meaning those groups had not scored well enough.

The test also looked at the growth of every academic level. A fourth-grader who reads at the fifth-grade level will still have to make progress to earn points, just as someone who

reads below grade level will have to improve.

This has tripped up some schools. In Grayson County, Superintendent Barry Anderson said one school that usually scored the highest on statewide tests scored the lowest this time around because growth rates were too low. It's confusing for teachers even as they try to improve, he said.

"That school didn't get dumb in one day that they took the test," Anderson said. "I'm conflicted about this. Our public will be conflicted."

At the middle and high school level, schools will see the most changes because of including testing from the ACT test. The statewide percentage

of students who are college or career-ready is 47.2 percent, which is an increase from last year of 38 percent.

High schools are also judged on growth and graduation rates. "It is multi-measured, but I think that's somewhat as a result of the attempt to meet the expectations of parents and teachers that the score on a test is not the only thing schools should be measured by," said Wilson Sears, director of the Kentucky Association of School Superintendents. "It is complicated, and we understand that, but I also think it is more comprehensive than it was before."

The first results: Scores indicate just how much state's schools need to improve

EDITORIAL

ASHLAND — It surely comes as no surprise to area residents that Russell and Ashland are the top two school districts in northeastern Kentucky based on the results of the new statewide tests.

Among the nine area school districts, only the Russell Independent, the Ashland Independent, Carter County and Greenup County schools systems were above the state average for college and career readiness.

Even the best schools in the state exhibited much room for improvement on how well they are preparing graduates for success after high school. For example, Russell's rank of 92 signifies its scores are higher than all but eight percent of Kentucky school districts. Schools whose rank is above 70 percent are considered proficient, and Ashland was the only other area district to achieve that level with 77.

While Russell can boast of being one of the best public school districts in Kentucky based on its test scores, the same scores also show that 35 percent — or more than one out of every three students — are still graduating from Russell High School unprepared for college work or for entry into the workforce. While that's much better than the statewide average of 47.2 percent,

it still is unacceptably high.

While a majority of area schools showed graduation rates higher than the state average, one wonders just how important valuable a high school diploma is if graduates still can't do what is expected of them in college or in a job.

The data is based on accountability test scores from the 2011-2012 school year; students were tested in reading, mathematics, science, social studies and writing under a new system that will be used for both state and federal accountability requirements. The new system emphasizes college and career readiness and is based on newer and tougher academic expectations.

Kentucky is the first state to test students under the new and rigorous common core standards that are on their way to becoming educational benchmarks nationwide, said Russell Superintendent Susan Compton. "We're laying a foundation and this is the first step," she said.

Parents should not be overly concerned that scores are almost certain to be lower in math and language arts, according to Compton. Partly that is because scores are based on a scale of 0 to 100 instead of 0 to 140.

All the data is available on the education department's web site, but in a week or so, parents will see the individual scores of their children and that is where they should look closely. Then they can talk to school counselors to discuss the results.

Also important under the new system is working toward improvement in all students, Russell chief academic officer Debbie Finley said. That is particularly true in a district like Russell, with many high-achieving students. "We have to look at each student because even the high-performing ones are expected to show growth," she said.

There is no question that Russell and Ashland are both excellent school systems, but the real message from the first round of testing is that even the best schools have much room for improvement.

The goal should not be to compare schools with each other, but with every school showing continual improvement based on its own test results. For example, the class of 2013 at Elliott County High School may not be able to compete with the graduating class at Russell High, but it should be better than the class of 2012 at Elliott County. In fact, getting better and better should be the goal of every school from the worst to the best.

We dream of the day when the vast majority of graduates of all area high schools are ready for success in college or in the workplace. We're still far from achieving that, but that is what we should expect off all high school graduates.

###

Three Clark County schools among best in state

By Bob Flynn
The Winchester Sun
November 5, 2012

Page 1 of 3

Some Clark County schools had very good showings on the new "Unbridled Learning" assessment system test results released Nov. 2, while some others didn't fare quite as well.

The district had three schools classified as distinguished and designated as schools of distinction — the highest designation — led by Pilot View Elementary which ranked No. 3 in the state out of 733 elementary schools. Trapp Elementary ranked No. 16 in the state, while Providence ranked No. 21.

Hannah McClure Elementary School also fared well earning proficient status — the second of the three designations — and ranked No. 89 overall.

On the other side, Central, Fannie Bush, Shearer and Strode Station elementary schools, and Conkwright and Clark Middle schools were classified as "Needs Improvement" schools, while George Rogers Clark High School was classified as a focus school, which is the lowest category.

Focus schools, as established by the Kentucky Department of Education, are those with non-duplicated gap groups — those in individual student groups

such as ethnic groups, students with disabilities, free or reduced lunch students — scoring in the bottom 10 percent of similar gap group scores, schools with an individual subgroups with scores below the state average for all students.

The district as a whole was in the "Needs Improvement" category, 1.5 points shy of a proficient rating.

Pilot View and Trapp Principal Steven Jenkins said the test scores were exciting for everyone in the two communities as well as people in the schools.

"I think this shows the commitment the teachers make every day and the hard work the students have put in as well. This truly is a team effort from the teachers and students to the parents and the members of the community. They all had a hand in this," Jenkins said. "The staffs at both schools dug into the data on the new assessments and said this is what they need and what we need to do to get the students where they need to be and they did it. We're all excited because this shows it is working."

Providence Principal Mark Rose said everyone at the school was very excited about thier test results.

"We're proud to be in the top 25. Everyone worked really hard and our parents and students deserve the credit for this as well as the staff," Rose said. "We're excited with this being the first year of the new tests but we still have some work to do, but having one year under our belt we know now what to expect and we want to go out and do even better next year." MORE

CONTINUED

Pilot View was the smallest school of the top 10 highest-performing schools in the state.

This is the first year for the new assessment system and Kentucky Department of Education officials warned before the results were released that districts across the state would probably see a drop of about 25-30 percent in the scores from those of last year's assessments under the old system.

Because of the complexity of the new system, 69 percent of schools would automatically fall into the "Needs Improvement" category. State officials also cautioned parents not to try to compare this year's results with last year's because it is the first year of the new system.

Clark County Schools Superintendent Elaine Farris said it was exciting to see the three elementary schools perform so well on the assessments, but there was also some concern over some of the other schools' results.

"This is a new baseline for us and we had a lot of celebrations. Pilot View, Trapp and Providence faculty, staff and students should be very proud of what they accomplished and Hannah McClure really worked hard and brought their score up, which is exciting," Farris said. "But we also have room for improvement."

In individual categories where the district fared well, scores show that Trapp, Pilot View and Providence had 60 percent or more students proficient or

distinguished in reading, while Pilot View and Trapp had zero percent novice students in reading.

As a district, elementary schools had 51.9 percent of students score proficient or distinguished in reading, above the state average of 48 percent.

In math, the three schools also had more than 60 percent of their students score proficient or distinguished in math, while the district as a whole had 50.1 percent proficient or distinguished students in math, also above the state average of 40.6 percent.

Eight schools had more than 60 percent of their students score proficient or distinguished in science, Conkwright and Clark Middle, Fannie Bush, Hannah McClure, Strode Station, Pilot View, Trapp and Providence elementaries. Providence had 100 percent proficient or distinguished students for the second year in a row.

District wide, 71 percent of elementary school students scores proficient or distinguished in math, compared to the state average of 68.8 percent. Middle schools scores show 63.2 percent of Clark students scored proficient or distinguished in math, compared to a 61.8 state average.

All schools but Fannie Bush had more than 50 percent of their students demonstrate growth in reading and math.

In social studies, six schools, Pilot View, Trapp, Providence, Central, Hannah McClure and Conkwright had 60 percent or more distinguished or proficient students. District wide, 64 percent of all elementary schools MORE

CONTINUED

students earned the distinction, compared to the state average of 59.8 percent. District middle schools recorded 56.7 percent proficient or distinguished students.

There were also areas where schools did not perform as well.

Six schools, Central, Fannie Bush, Shearer, Strode Station, Clark Middle and Conkwright, had 20 percent or more of their students scoring novice in reading, while Central, Fannie Bush, Shearer and GRC had 20 percent or more of students scoring novice in math.

GRC also had 28 percent or more students scoring novice in English II, Algebra II, biology and U.S. history on the end of semester assessments.

Farris said district officials have already started looking for ways of improving student performance.

"Obviously we have some areas of major concern for us and we've already begun conversations with our principals. We've got to make sure our students are mastering the content and our major focus has to be on addressing every student one-on-one," Farris said. "Then at the district level we've got to decide how we are going to best organize and spend our time to insure that our schools are successful. And we got to step back and look at what we are doing. We've got to evaluate if what we are doing is working. In some of these areas it's not working and we can't continue doing what we've been doing because it's not working."

Farris said that instead of looking outside the district to see what schools are doing to be successful, the district needs to take a look at the schools that did perform well.

"Why would we want to go out of our district when we have three of the highest performing schools in the state right here in our district. Why would we go somewhere else?" Farris said. "We need to be taking teachers out there to some of these schools and see what those teachers are doing. That's what we've got to do. Good teaching is good teaching anywhere, so we've got to take the things that are obviously working for them and use it elsewhere in the district."

"Our teachers are working very hard and we will continue to work together to improve student achievement. The board team is very focused on student achievement and will start hearing the schools' student achievement reports next week. They always ask the principals 'what do you need from the board to help you improve student achievement?' and I've told the principals to be very candid and honest with the board so we can allocate the resources to them."

Contact Bob Flynn at
bflynn@winchestersun.com.

END

Nov. 5, 2012

Park City Daily News

Bowling Green

Education officials focus on career readiness

By CHUCK MASON

The Daily News

cmason@bgdailynews.com/783-3262

Life after high school isn't always more schooling. Sometimes it is a job in the 9-to-5, work-a-day world.

When the Kentucky General Assembly approved Senate Bill 1 in 2009, paving the way for new tests for high school students, that eventually created "Unbridled Learning: College and Career Readiness for All," which took flight in the 2011-12 school year. The idea was to emphasize college and career readiness in Kentucky.

"Everybody has a place and thank goodness, we're all not going in the same direction," said Cindy Beals, assessment coordinator and instructional supervisor for Warren County Public Schools. "It's hard if you just finish high school and stop."

Jennifer Davis, director of elementary and secondary programs for the Bowling Green Independent School District, said "college is not the only direction everyone has to go," although 95 percent of graduates of Bowling Green High School "go on to a postsecondary (school) opportunity."

Beals said it is important that career readiness has been added to the testing program measurements. "It adds a little meat to what we are doing," said the former high school principal and business teacher.

Davis said the focus on career readiness is good because it pushes students to seek out options after high school. "It helps us pinpoint on where our students could improve," she said.

Beals said students need options, whether it is going right out in the business world, taking courses at Bowling Green Technical College first, obtaining a career certificate, and then entering the workforce.

There are more dual-credit opportunities for students than before, Beals said. Additionally, students need a background in life skills.

"I've always felt every child needed to learn how to balance a checkbook or know what compound interest does on a credit card," she said.

The results at the state level show that middle school students garner 44.1 points when measured for college and career readiness, while high school students received 51.8 points. That's on a 100-point scale.

In comparison, Bowling Green Junior High School received 51 points for college-career readiness, while Bowling Green High School received 58.3 points. Greenwood High School received 70.8 points, South Warren High School 75.5 points, Warren Central High School 47.5 points and Warren East High School 47.7 points.

Drakes Creek Middle School received 50.2 points, Henry F. Moss Middle School garnered 36.7 points, South Warren Middle School received 55 points and Warren East Middle School received 40.7 points.

Last week, Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress, or K-PREP, results and school rankings, under the new initiative were released. The program marks a change in philosophy, according to comments by local educators and information provided by the Kentucky Department of Education.

Statewide, 3,413 students who graduated from public schools met what the state calls "benchmarks" for career readiness or received an industry-recognized career certificate. In comparison, 18,741 graduates statewide met the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education Systemwide Benchmarks for reading (20), English (18) and mathematics (19) when taking the ACT test and are considered college ready.

The state report shows 47.2 percent of graduates received either a high school diploma or a certificate of attainment and were considered college or career

ready. The number of graduates statewide who received either a high school diploma or a certificate of attainment was 20,343, the report states.

School districts size up new rankings

Kentucky's Unbridled Learning off to mixed reviews

6:19 PM, Nov 6, 2012

Cincinnati Enquirer

Written by William Croyle

When the first data from Kentucky's new public education accountability system were released last week, one of the most recognizable differences was that schools and districts statewide were ranked against one another for the first time based on their overall scores.

The reactions to that have been mixed.

"We need to know what we need to do to compete globally," said Anthony Strong, superintendent of Pendleton County Schools. "I don't mind being compared, as long as we're using the same measuring stick."

Not all educators feel the measuring sticks in the new Unbridled Learning model can be the same, though.

"Every school has different demographics and different barriers – we have that within our own district," said Randy Poe, superintendent of Boone County Schools. "I think news agencies will focus on rankings, but I hope as educators we're focused on mastery and the education of the children."

The old Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) was replaced by Unbridled Learning after the General Assembly in 2009 ordered an education overhaul.

In February 2010, Kentucky was the first of 45 states to adopt the reading and math Common Core Standards, which provide consistent national benchmarks. Though social studies, science and on-demand writing are also tested under the new system, the standards aren't as rigorous as they are for reading and math. More stringent social studies and science standards are being developed.

Under Unbridled Learning, each district and school is given an overall score on a scale of 0 to 100 derived from five components: achievement, gap, college and career readiness, growth and graduation rate.

Overall scores are then ranked by school level (elementary, middle and high) from best to worst and placed into percentiles. Each is then classified as Distinguished (top 10 percent, or 90th percentile), Proficient (top 30 percent, or 70th percentile) or Needs Improvement (69th percentile or below).

Under CATS, data were never released with such rankings.

"The point of CATS was to compare a district against itself. Rankings weren't very reliable," said Lisa Gross, spokeswoman for the Kentucky Department of Education.

Yet when press releases were sent out by districts about their CATS scores, some districts would include where they ranked – a number they calculated on their own.

"We figured why not go ahead and give them what they want in a way that is reliable and valid," Gross said of Unbridled Learning.

The results last week weren't surprising. Beechwood and Fort Thomas schools were at or near the top, as they have been for years. Urban districts such as Covington and Newport were at or near the bottom, where they have regularly placed.

"The new system hasn't changed who ranks at the top or at the bottom – the reality is the reality," said Rick Ross, executive director of learning support for Covington Independent Public Schools.

MORE

Ross said the rankings can be frustrating. For example, he said Glenn O. Swing Elementary School in his district, which has made progress in recent years, was in the 78th percentile under CATS last year (based on district calculations), but is in the 19th percentile under the new system. While that may appear dismal, Glenn O. Swing is just 14 points away from proficiency (at the 70th percentile). Ross said 377 schools are within that 14-point range.

"So every one-tenth of a point can really drop you in the rankings," he said.

Kathy Burkhardt, superintendent of Erlanger-Elsmere Independent Schools, also has issues with the rankings. Each school and district is given a target improvement number to strive toward each year. So a school could meet or exceed its target number but still drop in the rankings.

"You won't know if you reached high enough because you don't know what everybody else did," Burkhardt said. "But we just have to focus on what we can control."

There is also some concern about districts not continuing to work together.

Many superintendents statewide share ideas that work, but why would a district share a good idea with another district that is in the same percentile range?

"I think this could set districts up to collaborate less with each other," said Terri Cox-Cruey, superintendent of the Kenton County School District.

Gross hopes that is not the case. "We are in this for one purpose: To get all students college and career ready. It's an ultimate goal everybody shares.

"Every child in every public school in this state is everybody's responsibility," he said.

Cox-Cruey said that, on the positive side, the rankings have shown that a school such as River Ridge Elementary in her district can succeed at high levels.

River Ridge is the district's largest school with more than 950 students. It's also a very diverse population with about 21 percent minorities, and almost half of the students qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch.

The school finished in the 98th percentile under Unbridled Learning.

"It shows you can do it," she said. "You can have high achievement and close the gap."

Meghan Glynn, a mother of four in Kenton County, said the new system is much improved over the old one. "A lot of expertise went into it, and we're on the right track," she said.

As for the rankings, which placed all three of her children's schools in the "Needs Improvement" category?

Glynn likes them.

"It's just like business – competition keeps you sharp," she said.

Poe said that, no matter where a district or school ranks, it's going to come down to hard work and constant monitoring of students throughout the year for each child to improve.

Strong, the Pendleton County Schools superintendent, agreed.

"Now we know where we were, where we are and where we have to go," he said. "It is what it is, and we know what we have to do."

Clark explains state test

Madisonville
Messenger 11/6/12

results to county school board

BY ERIN SCHMITT
MESSENGER STAFF WRITER
ESCHMITT@THE-MESSENGER.COM

The Hopkins County School Board heard an explanation behind the state's new accountability system during a meeting Monday night.

Jason Clark, the director of middle and secondary instruction and assessment for Hopkins County Schools, broke down the data for board members and offered explanations for the Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress results.

The results were released publicly on Friday morning. As a district, Hopkins County Schools received a 56.1 overall score out of 100 and were ranked in the 57th percentile across the state.

Any school or district that falls below the 70th percentile for the 2012 results was labeled needs improvement. Clark said percentile rankings will not be used in subsequent years.

"We just recently found out, that the percentile ranking was for this year so that they could establish the cut scores," Clark said.

The cut scores are what a school or district needs to achieve to be considered proficient. Proficient was defined as schools falling between the 70th and 89th percentile this year, with all schools performing at 90th or above considered distinguished.

Going forward, elementary schools will need to achieve a 62.5 overall score, Clark said. The elementary schools for the district scored 61.1 in 2012.

The district's middle

schools achieved a 52.9, but will need to score 58.7 next year to be labeled proficient. The high schools need to raise scores up from 54.3 to at least a 58 next year.

For Hopkins County Schools to be considered proficient, Clark said, the district must raise its overall score of 56.1 to 58.4.

"So these are all tangible," he said.

In other action, the board:

- Heard Principal Geoffrey Bailey give a report about Grapevine Elementary. Grapevine scored proficient on the K-PREP test. Grapevine had an 82nd percentile ranking, rating the school second overall in the district. Bailey said there's always room for improvement and teachers plan to target reading and writing.

- Heard Principal Tamara Winters give a report about James Madison Middle School. JMMS scored proficient on the K-PREP test. Winters said the school hopes to improve its college and career readiness score.

- Heard Principal Cristy Tomes give a report about Pride Elementary. Pride Elementary fell in the needs improvement category on the K-PREP test. Tomes said she was disappointed in the results. Administrators and faculty are looking to address the problem. Pride will be receiving a new service dog in February, she said.

- Heard Principal Phyllis Sugg give a report about Jesse Stuart Elementary. Jesse Stuart scored proficient on the K-PREP test. The school greatly improved in science and social studies, she said.

- Heard Principal Charles Gant give a report about West Broadway Elementary. West Broadway scored proficient on the K-PREP test. Gant said creating a positive environment, assembling a team with the right people in place and making kids want to come to school was the approach West Broadway used for success. Gant also said a second grade class has begun to publish the school's newspaper.

- Approved a trip for the Browning Springs Middle School girls basketball team by charter bus to a University of Kentucky women's basketball game in Louisville on Dec. 2; and for the Madisonville-North Hopkins High School FCCLA by school bus to a convention in Nashville, Tenn. on Nov. 27.

- Approved payments of \$771 to ELPO Law Office for professional service for the Hopkins County Schools Career and Tech Center, of \$132,296 to Peyronnin Construction for construction work on the Tech Center, \$3,923 to Ronald Johnson & Associates for elevation monitoring at the Tech Center and \$1,079 to Scholz Drywall and Interior for North roof repair.

- Approved matching an assistance offer with the School Facilities Construction Commission-Kentucky Education Technology System for \$68,101 for its education technology program.

- Approved the final 2012-13 site-based council budget of about \$1.15 million of the 13 schools.

- Approved a resolution for the Elizabeth Elam Coffman Memorial Scholarship Fund. The scholarship is granted to exemplary students at Hopkins County Central High School who meet the criteria.

- Heard about an energy saving competition for the schools that will monthly reward each school that uses less energy than the year before.

We congratulate

New school testing misses key element

Like most everyone else, we are continuing to try to digest the results we read last week from the state's new accountability tests for public schools.

Like Shelby County Superintendent James Neihof, we "continue to feel challenged" by what we saw.

Whether you think standardized testing works or whether this particular set of processes is appropriate, this is the system through which we for the foreseeable future will educate our students and evaluate our teachers and administrators.

In many ways, we think this system has some good ideas. We like that it focuses on the students being college or career ready — the ultimate goal, we always have avowed — we like that year-end unit tests are a component with the standardized tests, and we like that ultimately this system would allow for us to hold teachers accountable for the performance of their students.

But until we get the hang of this, the process is going to be as painful as these scores posted by our schools in this first data set.

That we had only four proficient schools out of 12 — a testing issue caused the eighth grades of Collins and Shelby County high schools to be considered their own middle schools — would seem on face value to be unacceptable.

Because there were no Shelby schools that rated "distinguished," a distinguished mastery of mathematics is not required to determine that two-

thirds of our schools are considered to "need improvement," with two of them scraping near the bottom of the 1,474-school heap.

The good news is that even if some of our schools aren't doing the job, most of our older students are making the grade of being college and career ready, although not 100 percent, as is the school district's goal.

We know that the Shelby County School Board, Mr. Neihof and his staff will bore into all this data and determine exactly where the gaps can be closed to ensure that our schools are in the near future among the most distinguished around.

We know they will look at a school or two on the list and model that performance.

They will do everything they can to ensure that our educational system becomes one of the state's best.

But they can't accomplish the one thing that would affect these test results more than anything else, the one thing that should be part of a comprehensive evaluation on any educational system: For our schools to succeed, it's the parents who hold the greatest potential for growth. Parents can adjust the environment, ensure proper focus and, ultimately, change the numbers.

In fact, parents can be the difference in the entire educational process, if only they would.

Until they do in Shelby County, don't look for school grades to change precipitously.

■ Letters to the Editor

School officials doing their best

As retired teacher with 34 years of experience in the Shelby County Public Schools and as the current chair of the Shelby County Education PAC, I would like to state confidence in the board of education, administration, teachers, parents and, most importantly, students of Shelby County Public Schools in taking the district in the right direction. Although test scores may appear different than they have in the past, we are still on the road to progressing to total proficiency for all.

There will be some who may take the scores out of context and use the information for political gain. I say that test scores should *not* be used to advance one's political position. The teachers, administrators, school board members and leaders work very hard each day to provide our students with a first-class education in this county. While there are areas for improvement in Shelby County, like in all counties in the state, we should believe in our leaders. We should all work together for the sake of the students to make each and every one of them college and career ready.

We believe in the current board members to do their best in these trying budget times to lead the way on this journey that is important to our students and their future.

**Joyce Dotson
Shelbyville**

Students deserved attention

I had the pleasure of attending a play at Collins High School on Oct. 26. What disappointed me was the low attendance for a school program.

These students put in a lot of time and effort, and deserved a better audience for such a wonderful performance. Not only the students in the play, but also the production staff that produced it deserve appreciation from Shelby County.

Teachers, principals, office staff or any person connected to the school system should have made an appearance for this *school program*. Our students deserve better than what they received with such a low attendance. Showing pride in students is important and very much needed and deserved.

When our students work hard, we should show them they are appreciated. To the cast and production staff at Collins High School: *an excellent job*. I look forward to more performances.

**Jo Ann Dove
Shepherdsville**

Editorial

BASELINE

School assessment provides starting point

Some parents of public school students in the Jackson Purchase area might have been alarmed when they saw the results of the first Unbridled Spirit accountability tests. (The Paducah Sun published stories about the assessment results last Friday). But viewed in context, the scores say less about the schools themselves than the challenges they face.

This is the first time this instrument has been used to assess performance in Kentucky's schools. Unlike prior, flawed testing that involved subjective (and therefore inconsistent) scoring, the new measure applied a more objective approach. The results were sobering and, in some cases, painful to hear.

Two area districts — Fulton County and Fulton Independent — ranked in the bottom 10 percent of the state. Fulton County ranked in the 5th percentile, which means that 95 percent of the state's schools scored higher, while only 4 percent scored lower.

Another five school districts — Paducah Independent, Livingston County, Carlisle County, Mayfield Independent and Trigg County — ranked below the 70th percentile, earning the classification "needs improvement."

But, as Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday said, "This is not an indicator of failure."

A couple of factors put the rankings in perspective. The first is that schools with the lowest scores generally had the highest enrollment of "gap students," those in traditionally under-performing groups, which brought down average scores.

Gap students include minorities (African American, Hispanic, Native American), students with disabilities, students in poverty (on free and reduced-price meals), and students with limited English proficiency. The scores reflect socio-economic barriers to education, as well as language or learning obstacles students come to school with. More than 90 percent of Fulton County's students fit at least one of the gap student categories.

The performance disparity between gap students and non-gap students exists not only between school districts but within each school district. And the rankings do not separately rank gap student and non-gap student performance between

schools. In other words, the scores tell more about a school's demographics than about the teaching or curriculum.

The gap students in a low-ranking district like Paducah may be performing as well as the gap students in a high-ranking district like McCracken County.

The same is true for non-gap students; the number of students with high college entrance exam scores at Tilghman shows that Paducah is providing the academic challenge that high-achieving students need.

The overall results were predictable. And predicted. Some school districts warned parents ahead of time what to expect.

What the rankings don't do is identify which schools — teachers, curriculum, facilities — are doing their job effectively and which are not. Not this year anyway.

Which brings up the second point about perspective: these first rankings are only a baseline. Holliday calls them, "a starting point for improvement." The real measurement of a school district's effectiveness will begin with the assessment next year and continue in subsequent years. It will be fair to question a school's effectiveness if the students lose ground.

The rankings also reveal the challenges school districts face, particularly closing the achievement gap separating minorities and economically disadvantaged students from the rest of the school population. The disparity exists throughout the state and nation, but that doesn't absolve any school district from the responsibility to do all it can to erase the gap.

Cont

The Paducah Sun, Nov. 7, 2012

Editorial

By the way, Murray Independent led the region, ranking in the 98th percentile, with Calloway County, Marshall County and Lyon County also in the "distinguished" classification of the top 10 percent. McCracken County just missed the classification. Those school districts have cause for celebration — but tempered with reality. They will be under pressure to maintain their high rankings in future assessments.

The Unbridled Spirit accountability model by itself provides an incomplete picture, but it is a useful tool for helping determine school success.

McKinney Elementary highest performing Lincoln school under new system

Lincoln County High School makes huge improvement in ranking; Hustonville Elementary ranked proficient

By Ben Kleppinger

The Interior Journal (Stanford)

November 7, 2012 Page 1 of 3

STANFORD — New school-accountability scores released Friday show Lincoln County's school district is ranked 79th in the state, scoring better than about 55 percent of Kentucky's school districts. The scores also show Lincoln County High School is now one of the better-ranked high schools in the state, having previously been ranked among the lowest.

District officials have been careful to emphasize that scores under the new Kentucky Performance Rating for Education Progress (K-PREP) system are not directly comparable with previous scores recorded under the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS).

"The data simply is not comparable to the results of years past," Superintendent Karen Hatter said. "It would be like looking at basketball, baseball and football scores and attempting to draw comparisons — you just can't do it."

But despite the differences, High School Principal Tim Godbey said his school's rise from the bottom 15 percent of high schools under CATS last year to the top third under K-PREP this year is still a meaningful change.

The improvement is at least partially due to efforts by staff and faculty following the school's designation as persistently low-achieving last October, Godbey said.

"Lincoln County High School is making increases in student achievement, but we still have work to do," he said.

Hatter said she is proud of the high school's performance.

"To move from a priority school to one close to the proficient mark is a tremendous accomplishment," Hatter said. "I commend the leadership of Mr. Godbey and the commitment of his entire staff."

Under the new accountability system, seven of Lincoln County's nine public schools and the district itself received "needs improvement" designations while two — Hustonville and McKinney elementary schools — were classified as "proficient."

Schools were scored out of a possible 100 points and then ranked across the state by percentile.

The bottom 69 percent of schools have been given the "needs improvement" classification. The top 10 percent are designated as "distinguished," while those in between have received the "proficient" label.

Lincoln County High School's score of 57.6 is ranked 77th out of 230 high schools in the state, placing it in the 67th percentile, just three percentiles short of a "proficient" classification.

Godbey said looking at the breakdown of the high school's score, the portion based on academic achievement remained largely unchanged from the previous years.

MORE

"What that tells me is regardless of the system we're on, we still have work to do," he said.

Godbey credited an "intentional focus" on improving ACT scores and college- and career-readiness with helping the high school's overall ranking rise so high.

Because the new K-PREP results drill down to the individual-student level, Godbey said they provide "real good targets" for improving student performance.

The results also show that the high school has some students scoring at the lowest "novice" level in all areas.

"I'm not surprised by that, but I want to make sure that as a school, we understand we can't accept novice," he said. "We have to bring those kids up."

Middle school in the middle

Lincoln Middle School's score of 55.2 ranked 152nd out of 333 middle schools, placing it in the 54th percentile.

Sarah Hagans, an academic performance consultant at the middle school, said despite uncertainty surrounding what the new K-PREP scores would look like, the middle school actually landed right about where officials expected it would.

"We expected that we would kind of be in the middle based on how our data looked in the past," she said.

The middle school has been given the goal for next year of improving its score by one point, which Hagans said is very doable.

But because even more different measurements will be incorporated into

school scores next year, it's still difficult to predict exactly what will happen, she added.

"We can't really anticipate where we might even compare to other schools," she said. "But we want to be better than where we are now."

Hagans said the individual information included in the new scores looks like it will be very helpful.

"Knowing where the problem is can help us move forward," she said. "If we can identify the specific problems within the content, then that's going to help."

McGuffey Sixth Grade Center's score of 53.2 was 179th among Kentucky middle schools, placing it in the 46th percentile.

McGuffey was also designated as a "focus" school because of "a significant achievement gap in reading between students with disabilities and those without disabilities," said Pam Hart, chief deputy of quality management for the district.

Elementary scores vary widely

At the elementary level, McKinney Elementary placed 110th out of 733 schools, putting it 85th percentile of elementary schools statewide.

McKinney Elementary Principal Jeff Craiger credited his predecessor, Don Leigh, with helping achieve the high mark and said he is extremely proud of the teachers and students at his school.

"We're just really proud of our school, really proud of our kids and we hope to continue with the success we've had in the past," he said.

Craiger noted that besides getting the highest score in Lincoln County, McKinney also received the fourth-

MORE

highest score among all elementary schools in a seven-district area of Boyle, Casey, Garrard, Lincoln and Mercer counties and Danville and Burgin independent districts.

Next year, McKinney's goal is to jump five percentiles up the rankings and earn a "distinguished" classification, Craiger said.

"I think that the systems (to accomplish that) are already in place," he said. "We were already doing the right things, we just need to tweak our practices."

Hustonville Elementary, which received a "proficient" classification like McKinney, is ranked 207th in Kentucky, landing it in the 72nd percentile.

Highland Elementary was 342nd in the state, with a score better than about 54 percent of elementary schools in the state.

Waynesburg Elementary was 424th in the state, while Stanford Elementary was 560th and Crab Orchard Elementary was 630th.

Waynesburg's score was in the 42nd percentile; Stanford's was in the 24th percentile; and Crab Orchard's was in the 14th percentile.

Difference in scores

The scores under K-PREP are substantially different from the old scores because they incorporate a whole bevy of new measurements for school achievement.

Under CATS, schools were assessed largely on academic achievement. Under K-PREP, academic achievement makes up just 30 percent of the score for elementary schools, 28 percent for

middle schools and 20 percent for high schools.

Schools' scores are now substantially affected by how individual students improve in proficiency over time and how well low-income, special-education, minority and English-language-learner students perform.

At the middle- and high-school levels, scores also account for how well students are prepared for college or a career.

And at the high-school level, scores are affected by graduation rates.

Hart said in order to score well in the new system, it's essential that all students are "met at their point of academic need and taught in a very intentional manner."

"This is a radical departure from the scores of the past that were primarily determined by the academic index," Hart said. "This new model requires that we develop a comprehensive learning system, where every student demonstrates academic progress every year."

END

Test scores contain good, bad news for schools in region

by Tony Fyffe
BSN MANAGING EDITOR

FRANKFORT — The first results of Kentucky's new statewide student testing system contain both good and news for public schools in the Big Sandy region.

The good news is that five schools in the region achieved "distinguished" status based on their scores while six others were listed as "proficient," as are two school districts.

The bad news is that the majority of public schools in the region and three districts are in the "needs improvement" category, which, according to Kentucky Education Commissioner Terry Holliday, is not as bad as its sounds.

"Because this year's data is the first from the Unbridled Learning model, I encourage educators,

parents, communities, elected officials and others with a stake in public education to think of these classifications as a starting point for improvement," Holliday said in a press release. "Although more than two-thirds of schools and districts are in the Needs Improvement category, this is not an indicator of failure. The Unbridled Learning model is one of continuous improvement, and schools and districts now have a wealth of data to use as they plan for improvement in student learning and achievement."

The three classifications are determined by the percentile rankings of the individual schools and districts. Those above the 90th percentile are considered distinguished, those between the 70th and 80th percentile are proficient and those below 70th are listed as needing improvement.

See TEST, Page A5

Continued from Front

The new testing system also identifies rewards and assistance schools, based on their overall scores and other data.

They include schools and districts of distinction, which are high-performing schools and districts that meet their current year annual measurable objective (AMO) in 2012-2013, student participation rate and graduation rate goal; have a graduation rate above 60 percent for the prior two years; and score at the 95th percentile or higher on the overall score.

Highest-performing schools are those that meet their current year AMO, student participation rate and graduation rate goal; have graduation rates above 60 percent for the prior two years; and score at the 90th percentile or higher on the overall score.

Focus schools are those that have a non-duplicated student gap group score in the bottom ten percent of non-duplicated student gap groups scores for all elementary, middle and high schools; those with an individual student subgroup within assessment grades by level with a score in the third standard deviation below the state average for all students; of high

schools that have a graduation rate that has been less than 60 percent for two consecutive years.

Priority Schools are those that have been identified as a "persistently low achieving (PLA)" school as defined by Kentucky Revised Statute KRS 160.346.

Distinguished schools in the Big Sandy region are two Floyd County schools, May Valley

Elementary with a 99th percentile ranking, and W.D. Osborne Elementary, with a 91th percentile ranking; two Johnson County schools, W.R. Castle Elementary and Meade Memorial, with 95th and 94th percentile rankings, respectively; and Paintsville High School, with a 92nd percentile ranking.

In addition, May Valley and W.R. Castle are listed as schools of distinction, W.R. Castle and W.D. Osborne are classified as highest performing schools and Paintsville High is a focus school.

Classified as proficient are three Floyd County schools, McDowell Elementary with a 81st percentile ranking; Allen Central Middle School with a 77th percentile ranking and Betsy Layne Elementary with a 76th percentile ranking; Paints-

ville Elementary and Paintsville High School's middle school students with 73rd percentile rankings each; and Porter Elementary in Johnson County with a 74th percentile ranking.

The Paintsville Independent School District, with an 85th percentile ranking, and the Johnson County School District, with a 75th percentile ranking, are also classified as proficient.

Floyd, Martin and Lawrence counties are listed as "needs improvement" districts with percentile rankings of 41th, 17th and 13th, respectively.

Twenty-seven schools are rated as needs improvement institutions.

Lawrence County schools in that category and their percentile rankings are Blaine Elementary, 5th; Blaine Elementary's middle school program, 15th; Fallsburg Elementary, 62nd; Fallsburg Elementary's middle school program, 26th; Lawrence County High School, 15th; Louisa East Elementary, 34th; and Louisa Middle School, 16th.

Blaine Elementary and its middle school program are also focus schools.

Needs-improvement schools in Johnson County are Central Elementary, 39th; Flat Gap Elementary, 27th; Highland Elementary, 68th; Johnson Central High School, 60th; and Johnson County Middle School, 64th.

Floyd County schools in the needs improvement column are Betsy Layne High School, 29th; Duff Elementary, 52nd; Adams Middle School, 28th; Stumbo Elementary, 62nd; Stumbo Elementary's middle school program, 62nd; Prestonsburg Elementary, 29th; Prestonsburg High School, 18th; South Floyd High School, 29th; and South Floyd Middle School, 12th.

Prestonsburg and South Floyd high schools are listed as focus schools.

Martin County's needs-improvement schools are Eden Elementary, 15th; Inez Elementary, 27th; Inez Middle School, 12th; Sheldon Clark High School, 27th; Warfield Elementary, 28th; and Warfield Middle School, 50th.

Of those schools, Inez Middle School is listed as a focus school.

The test report contains an abundance of information that includes achievement, gap, growth, college readiness and graduation rates.

For details, visit the Unbridled Learning page on the KDE Web site: <http://education.ky.gov/comm/UL/Pages/default.aspx>.